

INSIDE OBAMA'S IRAQ, P8 | THE D-WORD, P6

THE INDYPENDENT

Rent Reform Ruckus

ISSUE #132 FEBRUARY 27 - MARCH 19, 2009
A FREE PAPER FOR FREE PEOPLE

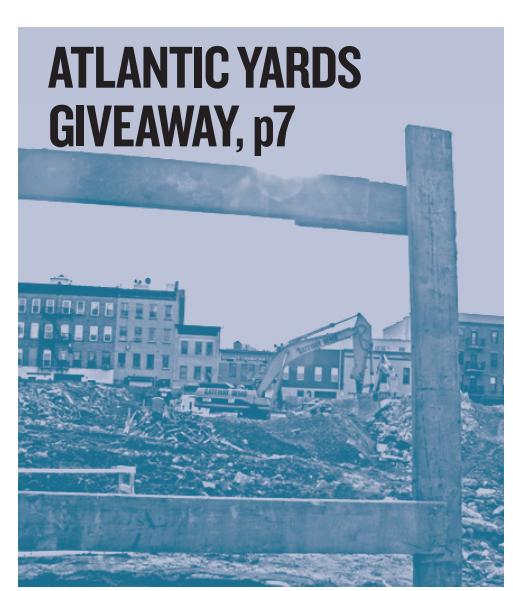
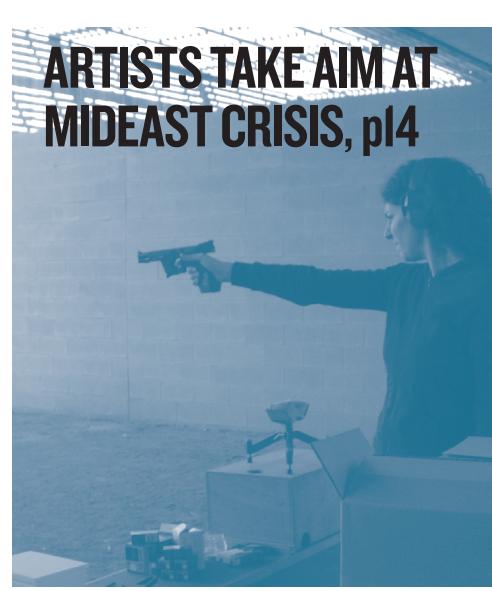


NYC's affordable housing is at stake as tenants, landlords battle in Albany, page 4

ASIA'S ECONOMIC MELTDOWN, p11

ARTISTS TAKE AIM AT MIDEAST CRISIS, p14

ATLANTIC YARDS GIVEAWAY, p7





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The Indypendent is a New York-based free newspaper published 17 times a year on Fridays. Since 2000, more than 600 citizen journalists, artists and media activists have contributed their time and energy to this project. Winner of dozens of New York Community Media Alliance awards, *The Indypendent* is dedicated to empowering people to create a true alternative to the corporate press by encouraging citizens to produce their own media. *The Indypendent* is funded by subscriptions, donations, grants, merchandise sales, benefits and advertising from organizations with similar missions. Volunteers write and edit articles, take photographs, do design work and illustrations, help distribute papers, update the website and more! *The Indypendent* reserves the right to edit articles for length, content and clarity.

The Indypendent is the newspaper project of the New York City Independent Media Center, which is affiliated with the global Indymedia movement (indymedia.org), an international network that is dedicated to fostering grassroots media production. NYC IMC sponsors three other projects, the children's newspaper *IndyKids*, the *IndyVideo* news team and the NYC IMC open publishing website (nyc.indymedia.org). NYC IMC relies on volunteer participation and is open to anyone who is interested.

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community calendar

MAR-APRIL

Please send event information to IndyEvents@gmail.com. The deadline for submissions is March 10.

MON MAR 2

7pm-9pm • FREE (\$5 Donation for meal)
EVENT: FROM JOHANNESBURG TO JERUSALEM: ANTI-APARTHEID ORGANIZING IN THE US. Join The Fifth Annual Israeli Apartheid Week as they present the film, *Have You Heard from Johannesburg?: Apartheid and the Club of the West*.
St. Mary's Episcopal Church
521 W 126th St
apartheidweek.org

TUE MAR 3

7pm • \$5 (Suggested)
WORKSHOP: "THIS IS FOREVER." Can radical movements respond to personal crises and provide personal care for mental illness, sexual assault, trauma and grief.
Bluestockings
172 Allen St (btwn Stanton & Rivington)
212-777-6028 • bluestockings.com

TUE MAR 3

7pm-9pm • FREE (\$5 Donation for meal)
EVENT: COMMUNITY POTLUCK FOR INTERNATIONAL SEX WORKERS RIGHTS DAY. The Sex Workers Outreach Project New York and Sex Workers Action New York invite you to learn about campaigns and programs by and for people in the sex trade.
Judson Memorial Church
239 Thompson St
(near Washington Sq Park)
347-748-9163 • swank@riseup.net

THU MAR 5

7pm-8:30pm • FREE
EVENT: COMMEMORATING THE 1969 REDSTOCKINGS ABORTION SPEAKOUT. Forty years ago, a group of women testified about their dangerous experiences with back-alley abortions or bringing a pregnancy to term and giving the baby up for adoption to a large West Village crowd, helping to spark the Women's Liberation Movement.
Judson Memorial Church
239 Thompson St
(near Washington Sq Park)
646-853-7100 • birthcontrolproject.org

reader comments

Post your own comments at indypendent.org or at the end of an article or email us at letters@indypendent.org.

DECades of Disaster

Response to "Outsourcing Our Wars: Halliburton's Army Captures the Spirit of an Era," Feb. 6:

My father was a union welder/pipe fitter who worked all the chemical refineries that line the Houston Ship Channel, plus he built nuclear reactor plants in Maryland and at Matagorda Bay, Texas. KBR was called Brown & Root in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. It was well-known on the Houston Ship Channel that even then, Brown & Root when cheap unskilled, uneducated labor pools of men were needed to work for the petrochemical corporate giants. In

4pm • FREE
PROTEST: RALLY FOR NEW YORK! Join unions, teachers, students, parents, healthcare workers and peace activists to speak out for fair solutions to the New York State budget crisis. United For Peace and Justice's campaign, "Beyond War: Another Economy is Possible," calls on us to make links between military spending and the economic crisis.
3:45pm: Gather at Walker St, west of Broadway (one block south of Canal St) nycupj.org • fairsharereform.org
212-868-5545

FRI MAR 6

8pm • FREE
EVENT: "MELTDOWN: THE ECONOMIC COLLAPSE AND A PEOPLE'S PLAN FOR RECOVERY." Join Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz and *Nation* magazine contributors Naomi Klein, Barbara Ehrenreich and Bill Fletcher, Jr. to discuss the origins of the financial collapse and how to ensure an equitable future for all Americans.
New York Society for Ethical Culture
2 W 64th St
nationinstitute.org • 212-822-0250

MON MAR 9

7pm • FREE
FILM AND DISCUSSION: "L.A. ANARCHISM & REPRESSION." The 2007 May Day police riots in L.A. sparked community action and outrage over officer misconduct. John A. Imani captured these violent moments—and their aftermath—in his film, *We Never Left, We're Still Here*.
Bluestockings, 172 Allen St
(btwn Stanton & Rivington)
212-777-6028 • bluestockings.com

TUE MAR 10

7pm • FREE
DISCUSSION: "LIVE FROM DEATH ROW" is The Campaign to End the Death Penalty's national tour, featuring the voices of death row prisoners, live from their prison cells, sharing their stories of loss, injustice, struggle and a hope for the end of dehumanizing practice of state-sanctioned murder. Several death row prisoners will speak live via speakerphone.
City College of New York, NAC Ballroom,



MON MAR 23
CELEBRATE THE LIVING THEATRE, LOWER EAST SIDE'S HAVEN FOR EXPERIMENTAL, RADICAL THEATER.
(See Calendar Listing)

137th St and Amsterdam Ave
nyc@nodeathpenalty.org

Freedom Hall
113 W 128th St (btwn Malcolm X Blvd/ Lenox Ave and 7th Ave)
212-222-0633
nycradicalwomen@nyct.net

THU MAR 12

6pm • FREE
BOOK RELEASE: Immigrant teens from the International High School at Lafayette will release their self-published "Struggle to Be Strong" anthology in a Connections Café Night. Students representing 50 countries will present original music, poetry, drama, artwork and multimedia around the themes of immigration, discrimination, homophobia, poverty, war, violence, conflicts with parents, peer pressure, self-esteem and other stories of courage.
Lafayette High School
Educational Complex, 3rd Fl
2630 Benson Ave, Bklyn

SAT MAR 14

6:30pm • (\$3 Suggested, \$8.50 for Buffet)
EVENT: INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATION: "WORKING WOMEN—VIBRANT FORCE FOR LABOR MILITANCY." "El pueblo unido jamás será vencido!" Let's be real: Without an immigrant female workforce, there would be no New York. Childcare will be provided.

MON MAR 23
10am-8:30pm • FREE
FILMS: CELEBRATE THE LIVING THEATRE with a day of screenings of documentaries and Living Theatre works from 1965 to the present. The Living Theatre was founded in 1947 as an imaginative alternative to commercial theater dedicated to transforming society from a competitive, hierarchical structure to a cooperative and communal expression.
CUNY Graduate Center
The Segal Theatre, 365 Fifth Ave
livingtheatre.org mestc.org 212-817-1860

TUES APR 7

10am-11:30am • FREE
WORKSHOP: WANT TO BECOME A SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS? Learn how to make your small business a beacon of environmental awareness. Organized by the Lower East Side Ecology Center and RSVP is recommended.
Sustainable NYC, 139 Avenue A
lesecologycenter.org • 212-477-3155

GETTING EGYPT ON BOARD

Response to "Pyramid Scheme: Egyptian Elites Bank on U.S.-Israel Alliance, Ignore Angry Populace," Feb. 6:

Egypt's reluctance to intervene in favor of the Gazan population was, and is, largely driven by fear of the Hamas model, a model of democracy that poses a threat to the model traditionally favored by the unelected autocrats and monarchs of countries such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Egypt has always preferred taking a backseat in the peace process in the Middle East.

For instance, the most serious initiative to come out of the Arab world, the Arab peace initiative, was proposed by Saudi Arabia. Yet Egypt is crucial to the peace process and we need it to show willingness to cooperate with

other Arab countries in finding a durable solution to the conflict between Israel and Palestine. Until then, a viable solution may remain a long way off.

—ELIANITA 55

Continued on page 15



NYPD's Racist Tactics Exposed

BY JAISAL NOOR

Ten years after the shooting of Amadou Diallo and subsequent public outcry against racial profiling, the New York Police Department continues to disproportionately target blacks and Latinos.

According to the New York Civil Liberties Union and Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) report, the NYPD stopped 543,982 individuals in 2008, more than 80 percent of whom were black or Latino.

Whites, who make up 44 percent of the city's population, made up only 10 percent of those stopped and questioned.

In the last year of the Mayor Rudolph Giuliani administration, police stopped 86,705 individuals in 2001. The 2008 total represents a 71,886-stop increase from the 2007 total of 472,096 stops and is 15 percent higher than the 2005 to 2007 average of 459,000 stops per year.

The report notes the disparity in frisking after stops: Between 2005 and June 2008, only 8 percent of whites stopped were also frisked, while 85 percent of blacks and Latinos who were stopped were also frisked.

The number of stops is on the rise despite the police's own data that show that almost 90 percent of those stopped over the past three years were never charged with a crime. Only 2 percent of stops resulted in recovery of weapons or contraband. Furthermore, according to the CCR, "Police stops-and-frisks without reasonable suspicion violate the Fourth Amendment, and racial profiling is a violation of fundamental rights and protections of the Fourteenth Amendment and the Civil Rights Act of 1964."

While the NYPD continues to deny allegations of profiling based on race, City Council member Charles Barron (D-East New York) told *The Indypendent* that the data "validates what activists have been

saying now for decades: the police are out of control. This report is an important tool to make the case that the police ... freely profile, harass and brutalize people. This is real, its not race-baiting that activists are making up."

TEN YEARS AFTER THE DIALLO KILLING

The Feb. 4, 1999, shooting of Diallo — an unarmed West African immigrant who was killed outside his Bronx home in a barrage of 41 bullets fired by four undercover police officers — galvanized a wave of protests against police brutality of the Giuliani administration. More than 1,700 people, including many of the city's elected black and Latino officials, were arrested for engaging in acts of civil disobedience.

Continued on page 12

Obama Foreclosure Plan Rescues Banks

BY ANN SCHNEIDER

The \$75 billion mortgage relief program President Barack Obama announced Feb. 18 is completely voluntary on the part of the banks, and uses public dollars to subsidize the inflated payments homeowners must make to keep up with their mortgages. Under the plan, lenders who participate must reduce mortgage payments to no more than 31 percent of

a borrower's income with the government making up the difference between the old payments and the new.

In Obama's version of help, the predatory lender gets subsidized by his individual victim and, by you, the taxpayer.

Giving struggling homeowners access to a much bolder remedy known as a "cram-down" is required to reverse the vast transfer of wealth upward the sub-prime lending crisis represents.

Prior to a 1993 Supreme Court decision (*Nobelman v. American Savings Bank*), bankruptcy judges had the power to modify the repayment terms of a mortgage when the value of the house was less than what was still owed ("underwater"). Since 1993, residential

**THE
PEOPLE'S
LAWYER**
a project of the
National Lawyers Guild NYC

mortgages on a principal residence have been the only loan that could not be modified by a bankruptcy judge. Landlords, owners of yachts or second-home owners were entitled to cram down any liens on these items if they filed bankruptcy. They could strip off any amount of debt that exceeded the market value of the asset. Thus, bankruptcy judges had the discretion to adjust a debt load in response to loss of value.

Fierce opposition from Wall Street has previously stymied legislation that would permit judicial modification of mortgages (a more delicate phrasing than "cram-down").

Continued on page 12

Domestic Uprising

BY JESSICA LEE

Women are stepping out from behind strollers and kitchen counters to fight for a bill of rights that would establish human rights and fair labor standards for the more than 200,000 domestic workers who are employed across New York state.

The Domestic Workers Bill of Rights (A1470) passed through the New York State Assembly's labor committee in early February and State Senate leaders appear to be poised to support the companion bill (S5235).

"New majority leadership seems to support the bill quite explicitly," said Ai-Jen Poo, a lead organizer with Domestic Workers United (DWU). Poo said that Senate Democratic Majority Leader Malcolm Smith described the bill as, "precisely the type of initiative that the new senate leadership is going to move."

Domestic workers are one of the few professions unprotected by state and federal labor legislation. Isolated in the homes of their employers, nannies, caretakers and housekeepers suffer from abuse and lack of health insurance, sick days, overtime and severance pay.

DWU organizers say that domestic workers are the "invisible backbone" of New York City's economy, that without their work, thousands of accountants, doctors, architects, bankers and those in the entertainment industry would be unable to work.

"The bill of rights would provide precisely the kind of safety net that domestic workers need in this time of [economic] crisis," Poo said.

For more information, 718-220-7391 or domesticworkersunited.org.



YOUR CASA IS YOUR CASA: New York City Council Member Thomas White, Jr. (D-Jamaica) addresses the crowd of ACORN Home Defenders and neighbors who gathered Feb. 19 to defend the home of Queens resident Myrna Millington, who is dressed in sweats and a Yankees hat. As a result of a predatory loan, Millington's home is now in foreclosure. "I am not leaving my home," she told reporters. PHOTO: JOEL COOK

Homestayers Plant Their Feet

BY SARAH SECUNDA

Myrna Millington stood on the front lawn of her home of 38 years, in Laurelton, Queens, Feb. 19 and announced, "I am not leaving my home. I am staying right here."

The victim of a predatory subprime loan, the 73-year-old widow and retiree has been in foreclosure since September 2008 and now faces eviction.

Millington was joined by a crowd of community supporters chanting, "Enough is enough!" The rally was one of many actions held across the country to mark the launch of a nationwide "Home Staying" Campaign spearheaded by the nonprofit organization ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now).

The ACORN campaign aims to prevent evictions by sending teams of "Home Defenders" trained in civil disobedience to the aid of those facing eviction. The organization also provides free loan counseling and has thus far been able to postpone the auction of several properties, including

Millington's house.

America's home foreclosure crisis continues to snowball. According to ACORN, 2.3 million families lost their homes to foreclosure in 2008. Currently, in Queens alone, more than 100 homes that have been repossessed by financial institutions are sold at auction every week.

On Feb. 18, President Barack Obama rolled out his "Homeowner Affordability and Stability Plan," which according to the administration, will keep up to nine million homes from foreclosure by allowing homeowners to restructure mortgages. The plan will go into effect March 4.

As public outrage mounts over reports of Wall Street bonus packages while billions of bailout dollars remain unaccounted for, citizens are banding together and planting their feet.

"We've been working too hard for this," said Denise Parker, a Queens resident and one of several "Homestayers" to speak at the demonstration. "We're not moving."

ACORN is calling on state governments to enact a one-year moratorium on all home foreclosures.

For more information, acorn.org or the ACORN housing hotline, 347-410-5894.

How Vacancy Decontrol Works

Former-Governor George Pataki, the Republican-controlled New York State Senate and a compliant Democratic-held state Assembly enacted vacancy decontrol in 1997 after heavy real-estate lobbying and campaign contributions. Thus began the slow phasing out of rent-regulated housing.

For a landlord to get an apartment deregulated, it must be vacated by the tenant — either voluntarily or through eviction. Once it is vacated, the landlord can automatically claim a 20 percent increase. For an apartment with \$1,000 in monthly rent, this gives the landlord a \$200 hike a month without even having to put a new coat of paint on the walls.

For larger increases, the key law is that a landlord can raise the monthly rent by one-tenth the cost of any remodeling work done. To get the rent from \$1,200 to the \$2,000 deregulation threshold, the landlord needs to say she or he did \$32,000 worth of work. That sounds like a lot, but often the landlord does some cosmetic work coupled with cheap materials to make an apartment look better.

In many cases, the landlord swindles the new tenants by overstating the costs of renovations, but it goes undetected. The state housing agency, the Department of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR), only investigates the landlord's claims that an apartment was legitimately deregulated if the new tenants make an overcharge complaint.

Tenants who move into a new apartment should obtain a "rent history" from the DHCR. This will show the last registered legal rent in the apartment. If you see big rent increases, you may want to file an overcharge complaint. Act quickly, because you only have four years to make a claim. If you win an overcharge complaint, the housing agency will reset your rent; if it finds "willful" overcharges, it can award triple damages.

Call the DHCR at 718-739-6400.

Rent Reform Showdown

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

President Barack Obama promised change in the 2008 election and voters responded by giving him a decisive victory. In New York, voters also demanded change by giving the Democratic Party the majority in the state Senate for the first time in 43 years. The Senate's former GOP boss, the silver-haired majority leader Joe Bruno, had resigned a few months before the election, leaving his helicopter rides and pimped-out SUV, and was indicted for corruption in January.

Bruno and the senate's Republican majority had gutted the state's rent-regulation laws twice in the previous 12 years, and refused to consider any measures that might have helped tenants. So the Democrats winning a majority — by a slim 32 to 30 margin — removed a roadblock to progressive change. Or did it?

On Valentine's Day, 200 New York City tenants attended the Black and Puerto Rican/Hispanic Legislative Caucus weekend in Albany to push for vital rent reforms that would restore some housing protections and make the city more affordable. The Assembly passed a package of ten rent-reform bills Feb. 2. Those bills include measures that would limit landlords' ability to claim occupied apartments for "personal use" and would repeal the "Urstadt Law" of 1971, which bars New York City from enacting any rent regulations stronger than the state's. The Senate is expected to take up the bills in early April.

The top priority for the tenant movement, however, is repealing "vacancy decontrol." Enacted in the 1990s, it lets landlords deregulate vacant rent-stabilized apartments if the rent can legally be \$2,000 per month or more. (Rent stabilization covers buildings with six or more apartments built before 1974, or buildings where the owner accept-

ed it in exchange for tax breaks.) Once an apartment is deregulated, there are no restrictions on rent increases and the new tenant has little to no housing rights. The bill to repeal vacancy decontrol, S. 2237, has 23 co-sponsors.

"This is about getting tens of thousands of apartments back into the hands of people who want to live in safe, decent and affordable housing," said the bill's chief sponsor, Sen. Andrea Stewart-Cousins (D-Westchester).

"We have to get to the root cause of why landlords want to get rid of us — vacancy decontrol," said Cathy Stephens, a Harlem tenant and member of Community Voices Heard. "With the same purpose that we got Obama elected, we need to put our efforts towards ending this law."

Both sides expect a tough fight. "Real-estate interests have poured a ton of money into Albany hoping to prevent exactly this," says Dan Levitan of the Working Families Party. "It's a battle for the soul of the Democrats. Whose interests do they represent, landlords or tenants?"

According to the *New York Times*, a group of "major real-estate developers, lobbyists and limited liability corporations," anticipating a Democratic shift in the state Senate, gave more than \$750,000 for the 2008 election. That is 15 times more than they gave to the Senate Democrats' central campaign accounts for 2006. Those accounts are now controlled by Deputy Majority Leader Jeff Klein (Bronx-Westchester) and Majority Leader Malcolm Smith (Queens).

Last year, a slew of tenant associations and groups raised money and, more important, supplied people power to staff campaigns for Democratic state Senate candidates. Tenant groups, labor unions, gay-rights organizations and other progressives knocked on voters' doors and called them from phone banks to help Democrats gain key seats in

Long Island and Queens.

Ironically, because the Democratic majority is so slim, the state senators who have most benefited from that activism are four considered among the party's most conservative: Jeff Klein, Carl Kruger (Brooklyn), Craig Johnson (Nassau County) and Pedro Espada Jr. (Bronx). Espada and Kruger were among the "Gang of Three" that threatened to vote with the Republicans until they were given rewards — in Espada's case, being named chair of the Senate Housing Committee. Tenant advocates believe that real-estate interests gave the gang the go-ahead and wanted to send a message about rent reform.

"When you got 32 Democrats and you need 32 votes, one member can hold you up," says Michael McKee of the Tenants Political Action Committee.

All four of these senators have rent-regulated voters in their districts, with 76,500 in Espada's and 15,600 in Klein's. Although there are rent-regulated tenants in Johnson's Nassau County district, vacancy decontrol is generally seen as affecting mainly New York City, especially Manhattan.

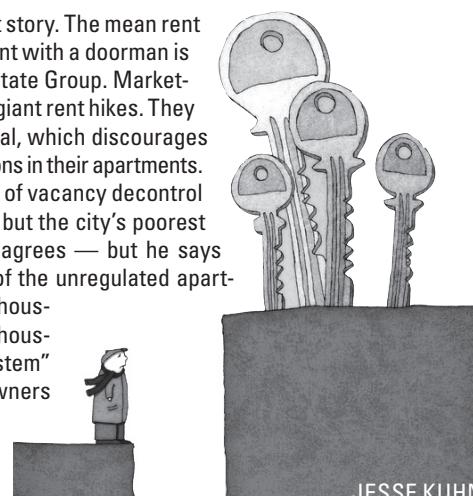
When the Republicans controlled the Senate, the landlord lobby, led by the Rent Stabilization Association (RSA) and the Real Estate Board of New York, contributed millions of dollars to the GOP. The GOP-controlled Senate repeatedly blocked pro-tenant legislation passed in the Assembly. According to multiple sources, Senator Malcolm Smith approached the RSA before the election about donating more to the Democratic senatorial cause but was rebuffed. However, the RSA reportedly offered to settle \$600,000 of state Senate committee debts from campaigns after the Democrats took control. Senate Democrats and Smith reportedly declined the offer, but Smith has not taken a position on repeal of vacancy decontrol.

Rent Regulation: A Key to an Affordable City

Vacancy decontrol has contributed to skyrocketing rents, gentrification and increased tenant harassment, as there is an economic incentive to evict rent-stabilized tenants for higher-paying occupants. According to the Rent Guidelines Board, the median income of households in rent-stabilized units was \$36,000 in 2007, and the median monthly rent of rent-stabilized units was \$925. Along with limits on rent increases, rent-regulated tenants also have stronger protections against eviction, rights to renew their leases and the ability to pass on their apartments to immediate family members. Senior and disabled rent regulated tenants can also qualify for rent freezes. According to the New York State Tenants and Neighbors Information Service, almost 60 percent of rent-regulated tenants are people of color.

For market-rate tenants, it is a different story. The mean rent in Manhattan for a one-bedroom apartment with a doorman is \$3,737 a month, according to The Real Estate Group. Market-rate tenants have no protections against giant rent hikes. They also do not have a right to a lease renewal, which discourages them from complaining about living conditions in their apartments.

Tenant groups say the long-term effect of vacancy decontrol will be to eliminate rent regulations in all but the city's poorest neighborhoods. The RSA's Jack Freund agrees — but he says that's a good thing. Although almost all of the unregulated apartments built in the city have been luxury housing, he contends that the increase in the housing supply "ripples down through the system" and that if the market were freed up, owners would be in a position to provide housing to all levels of the market.



JESSE KUHN

The Landlord Lobby

Along with real-estate concerns, individual landlords and deep-pocketed developers, the Rent Stabilization Association (RSA) and Real Estate Board of New York constitute the landlord lobby. Its power comes from their money, plain and simple. The landlords cut the campaign checks to politicians and expect legislation benefiting their interests.

TENANTS, HOUSING GROUPS AND PROGRESSIVE ORGANIZATIONS

Tenants as a voting bloc have massive potential in New York politics. There are more than two million rent-stabilized tenants in the city and hundreds of thousands more in Mitchell-Lama, Section 8 buildings and public housing.

Housing Here and Now is the housing organizing arm of ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now), a national group that organizes low-income workers and people of color. Housing Here and Now is leading trips to Albany and holds rallies to strengthen the rent laws.

Contact them at 718-246-7900 ext. 247 to get involved.) The Real Rent Reform campaign is a coalition of housing groups and tenant associations that organize phone banks targeting rent-regulated constituents of state senators who have not yet endorsed repealing vacancy decontrol.

The union-backed Working Families Party (WFP) has the skills and resources to target rogue Democratic state senators who do not support repealing vacancy decontrol. The WFP's Dan Levitan says it has no current plans to do so, but notes that Pedro Espada, Jr.'s district "is full of tenants" and that might persuade him to do the right thing. The WFP also supplied 50 organizers to propel Craig Johnson to victory in a special election in 2007.

ACORN has been concentrating on foreclosure assistance, but it also has the constituents and resources to reform the rent laws. It is influential in the WFP.

Two important tenant organizations are the city-based Metropolitan Council on Housing and the statewide Tenants And Neighbors.

The Home Rule Question

Jack Freund of the RSA says he will not discuss the group's campaign contributions. He argues that with the city financially strapped and dependent on real-estate taxes, now is "absolutely the wrong time" to impose regulations that would reduce landlords' revenues. Vacancy decontrol and the other changes in the rent laws enacted in the 1990s, he says, "are the only things that have breathed life into the real-estate market" in the city. The prospect of deregulation has encouraged more investment in rental housing, he adds.

Tenant groups call some of those investors "predatory equity." These are highly leveraged private equity firms that bought huge swaths of rent-regulated housing. Their business plan depends on gaining enough vacancies to jack the rents up to market rates. One such firm is Vantage Properties, which bought 48 Queens buildings for \$300 million last year, according to the Real Deal.

Vantage tenant Nancy Encarnación says the firm is deliberately allowing living conditions to deteriorate to drive her and her neighbors out. "We don't demand luxury, just a decent place to live," she adds.

Legal Services New York claims that Vantage Properties' profit model runs afoul of the law, because the only way to achieve such a large tenant

turnover is by dubious means. It filed a lawsuit last year to curtail the firm's practices.

The Stewart-Cousins bill would also regulate apartments that were deregulated after 1997 if their rent is below \$5,000 (or \$3,500 in Nassau, Westchester, and Rockland counties). According to Tenants and Neighbors, more than 100,000 apartments in the city have been deregulated by vacancy decontrol or condo/coop conversions. About 1 million apartments remain regulated, about half of the city's rental housing stock.

"We need nine more senators to pass this bill," Stewart-Cousins said. So far, 22 Democrats and one Republican (Frank Padavan, Queens) have signed on as cosponsors. The 10 Democrats who have not endorsed it include Smith, Klein, Espada, Kruger and Johnson.

Bennett Baumer, a New York City-based housing organizer, contributed to this article.

The fact that the state legislature in Albany has power over New York City rent and eviction laws has long been a source of frustration for tenant groups and city elected officials. In 1971, the Urstadt law took home rule over rent laws away from New York City. It barred cities of more than one million people from enacting rent regulations stronger than the state's.

Tenants argue that restoring home rule to New York City is good government, but landlords fear that the City Council would be more apt to enact pro-tenant legislation than state legislators who take campaign donations from the landlord lobby and have no rent-regulated tenants in their districts.

Although tenant groups, such as the Metropolitan Council on Housing, have long called home rule essential for preserving the city's affordable housing, others may have conceded the issue. The Housing Here and Now coalition supports repealing Urstadt, says Executive Director Michelle O'Brien, but ending vacancy decontrol is its top priority.

"Some Democrats have made it pretty clear they're against repeal of Urstadt," said Dan Levitan, spokesperson with the Working Families Party.

One of them is Pedro Espada Jr.



NEW YORK STATE SENATORS



Jeff Klein: Klein is the number-two guy in the state Senate. He is known to prefer raising the vacancy-decontrol threshold to \$3,000, instead of the current \$2,000. He is rumored to be actively campaigning against the repeal of vacancy decontrol and triangulating on other progressive initiatives such as raising taxes on the rich—the top New York State income-tax bracket now starts at \$40,000 a year.



Pedro Espada Jr.: Espada is the chair of the housing committee and has not taken a position on vacancy decontrol, although he is against restoring home rule to New York City. He told *Daily News* columnist Juan Gonzalez that he has an alternative plan to vacancy decontrol, but would not reveal it. Elected to the Senate last November, Espada previously held a seat in another Bronx district, but lost it in 2002 after he switched to the Republican Party. He is not respected by Senate Democrats, who resent his use of their small majority to extort personal power. Espada might also be indicted for campaign-finance violations later this year. As of press time, he did not have a district office in the Bronx.

Craig Johnson: Johnson won his Nassau County seat in a 2007 special election with strong support from the Working Families Party and tenant groups. He takes his cues from fellow-senator Jeff Klein and is also triangulating on tax reform and vacancy-decontrol repeal.



Carl Kruger: Kruger has a campaign war chest of \$1.6 million, "much of it from city real-estate moguls who appreciate his support," wrote Tom Robbins of *The Village Voice* in April 2008. Kruger ran unopposed last year and brokered a deal with Bruno to redraw his district in 2002 in exchange for supporting conservative issues. Fellow senate Democrats believed that he "spied" on for senate Republicans. According to the *Daily News*, Kruger also wants to take some surplus campaign cash to form a "Blue Dog" coalition of center-right Democrats in the senate.

The Early History of the New Depression

BY ARUN GUPTA

The American century is drawing to a close. The United States is a wounded, but dangerous giant as its power is waning. As there is no contender for the throne, however, U.S. military and political power will continue to be projected globally with the support of other national elites, but with diminishing effect.

The economic crisis is leading nations to retreat inward. Just like the Great Depression, which saw the rise of national economic plans such as the New Deal, the Soviet Union's five-year plans and fascist Germany's reindustrialization, the proliferation of stimulus plans and bailouts worldwide today indicates the global economic order is unraveling.

The Asian economic model may be finished, with exports declining 50 percent or more in Japan, Taiwan, South Korea and other Asian powerhouses. With demand collapsing worldwide, countries can no longer export their way out of a recession. China's response, with its huge internal market and cash reserves, has been to implement a far larger and more rational stimulus than the Obama plan.

Yet focusing on domestic consumption to stimulate growth is a losing proposition. Production cannot survive on internal demand alone, and prioritizing domestic manufacturing over foreign trade will inevitably degenerate into "beggar-thy-neighbor" economic warfare. There may be a turn to regional economic and political blocs that countries like Russia and Venezuela are promoting, but these are embryonic for now.

This period harkens back to the time between the two world wars when the United States was the industrial and financial powerhouse, but not the political or military superpower. China is now an industrial and financial behemoth, and it is better placed to weather the global depression than an ailing Japan and a fraying European Union. (The European Union is flirting with disaster, as it does not have the monetary tools to aid Central and East Europe's export-oriented economies, which are contracting severely and could drag many European banks under.)

China is decades from imposing the type of post-WWII system of governance that saw the United States forge the Bretton Woods Agreement to manage the world economy, establish the United Nations to enshrine big-power rule, wield the Cold War military and nuclear weapons as global instruments of violence, unleash the transnational corporation as the vanguard of capital and enforce a social compact to tame organized labor and repress anti-capitalist movements.

THE NEOLIBERAL TURN

The post-WWII system collapsed in the early 1970s. Monetary policy was undone by outflows of U.S. dollars starting in the late 1950s that accelerated with the huge outlays on the Vietnam War. The corporate rate of profit was depressed by overcapacity resulting from the reindustrialization of Japan and Western Europe and the emergence of newly industrialized countries. (Corporate dividends dried up and the "real" interest rate was low or even negative at times, thus draining the wealth of shareholders and bondholders.)

The era of decolonization and the U.S. defeat in Indochina blunted state violence as a tool and energized radical democrats

across the world, including in the U.N. General Assembly. And 1960s social movements started making economic as well as political demands that put further pressure on elites.

Enter neoliberalism to address falling profit rates (and to counter radical political movements). The aim was to reconstruct national economies and the world system with the tools of privatization, deregulation and liberalizing capital flows and the ideology of personal responsibility. The United Nations was defunded and stripped of power, labor was forced back into competition with itself through repression and deregulation, and the Global South was crippled by structural adjustment programs. Wealth flowed upwards as wages and benefits were choked. Americans adjusted by working more hours

it created one asset bubble after another that governments would then bail out when they burst, such as with the Savings and Loan bubble in the 1980s.

Social programs were starved, but police, prisons, surveillance and military were put on steroids. While the post-WWII state was a warfare-social welfare state, the Reagan-Thatcher model is a warfare-corporate welfare state — which the Obama administration fully supports.

WEAK MEDICINE

There is a perception that because neoliberalism has been discredited, its time has passed. But laissez-faire ideology has been thoroughly discredited many times before.

The Obama stimulus is not a return to

contends the local government shortfall over the next two years could be up to \$500 billion, which means the cycle of job cuts, rising unemployment and Medicaid costs, declining tax revenues, widening budget deficits and further job cuts will accelerate.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates the stimulus plan will produce 3.9 million jobs at most by the end of 2010, but the actual job deficit by then could be 12 million or more from the start of the decline in December 2007.

Obama's overall economic policy is still cut from the neoliberal cloth. He supports increased military spending, as well as an escalation of the war in Afghanistan; he reneged on his campaign pledge to eliminate the Bush tax cuts right away, and he wants to stick the middle class with the tab for the crisis by cutting Social Security and Medicare.

The reason some may think the neoliberal era is history stems from confusing its tools, such as deregulation and liberalizing capital flows, with its goal of reconstructing ruling-class power. This is evident in how wealth was redistributed upwards. By the late 1970s, the share of national wealth held by the top 1 percent in the United States was at a low, barely more than 20 percent. A few years later, then-U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker — who is now back in the White House — jacked interest rates, boosting the wealth and income of creditors (and triggering the Global South's debt crisis). By the late 1980s, the top 1 percent held more than 35 percent of the wealth.

RESCUING THE RICH

In this moment, policies are being rigged to ensure shareholder and bondholder wealth is salvaged, while homeowners are tossed pennies. The plan to spend \$275 billion to help all homeowners in trouble nationwide is dwarfed by the government's asset guarantees and bailouts to Citigroup alone, which tops \$300 billion.

Washington has pumped more than \$45 billion of taxpayer money directly into Citigroup, despite the fact that its market value is about \$13 billion. Bankrupt insurance giant AIG has received more than \$150 billion, but the government has yet to take over its operations, which are being sold off cheaply to other investors. Bailing out the auto sector may eventually top \$100 billion, but GM and Chrysler are worth perhaps a few billion combined.

In terms of the automobile sector there is massive overcapacity as U.S. vehicle demand has slumped to less than 10 million this year. Much of the overcapacity in capital (factories, infrastructure and inventory) is being sustained by bailout money. But much of the overcapacity in labor is being destroyed through attacks on wages and benefits of autoworkers and retirees.

As for the banks, Paul Krugman writes that the Obama administration favors "lemon socialism" because it keeps proposing plans that "involve huge handouts to bank stockholders." Nationalization would save the banking sector, but corporate management, shareholders and bondholders would be wiped out. And nationalizing one sector might also open the door to nationalizing the automobile and energy sectors and strengthen the push for universal single-payer healthcare.

This would hardly mean the end of capitalism, but it would mean the rich would pay for the three-decade-long orgy they enjoyed at the world's expense. It would signal the real end of the neoliberal project.



S.M. VIDAUERRI

and sending more household members into the workforce. And consumer debt was used to buoy consumption.

Debt has also been critical to "financialization," the leveraging of speculative capital to increase profits. This worked because the financial sector increased its debt from about 10 percent of the gross domestic product in 1970 to nearly 120 percent by the time it burned down the house in 2007. But

activist government; it's weak medicine to counter the real deflationary threat. Of the \$787 billion plan, about 40 percent is for tax cuts. The "investments" mainly boost programs deprived of funds for years. There is a lot of talk about creating a hi-tech green economy, but little money has been put on the table.

The plan will transfer about \$140 billion to the states, but economist Robert Kuttner

A Brooklyn Bailout?

BY DANIEL GOLDSTEIN

There is a rail yard to nowhere in Brooklyn, which could set the stage for New York becoming the poster child for misuse of federal stimulus funds — pork of the most rancid kind.

In Prospect Heights, there has been a five-year-long grassroots fight against the Atlantic Yards development proposal that consists of 16 skyscrapers (6,430 housing units) and a \$1 billion arena that would become the new home of the New Jersey Nets basketball team, which was purchased by the developer, Forest City Ratner (FCR), to enable a corrupt land grab in the heart of the borough.

Poor planning, project mismanagement, pending lawsuits and the financial crisis have indefinitely halted the project, but not before FCR has demolished half the neighborhood and partially completed some preliminary work on an 8-acre rail yard, part of the 22-acre project site.

FCR has the ultimate insider, former U.S. Senator Al D'Amato, who is now lobbying for a slice of New York's stimulus grant. FCR wants to use the stimulus bill for a federal bailout for a private professional basketball arena and a speculative project of unknown design, cost or benefit — a project that is already subsidized to the hilt.

Atlantic Yards is propped up by city, state and federal taxpayer subsidies in the form of direct cash payments, below-market and free public land, housing subsidies, tax breaks and exemptions, estimated to be worth between \$1.5 and \$2 billion. FCR expects to float an \$800 million triple tax-exempt arena bond estimated to be a subsidy worth about \$165 million. All for a basketball arena that New York City's Independent Budget Office has shown to be an economic loss for the city and, at best, a wash for the state.

FCR has also received the enormous windfall benefit of New York State's support for eminent domain at the site.

NEIGHBORHOOD BATTLEGROUND

The community opposition is concerned that FCR will attempt to secure stimulus funds by claiming Atlantic Yards is a "transit project" because they are obligated to build a new rail yard. FCR received the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's (MTA) Vanderbilt Rail Yard development rights, despite a bid less than half the appraised value, because it had committed to building a new, "state-of-the-art" rail yard. The sole purpose of the new yard would be to facilitate the construction of the arena, rather than any transit need the MTA expressed in 2005 when it accepted FCR's lowball offer — an offer which FCR has yet to pay. Now FCR wants federal tax-

pliers to bail them out of their commitment to build this rail yard to nowhere.

Most important, nearly all economists agree that arenas are not economic generators or cost-effective job creators. FCR has never even publicly announced the estimated number of new jobs the arena would create because it would be woefully few, especially in relation to the arena's public cost. And the opportunity costs are dramatic.

The project, including the arena, is not "shovel-ready" by any stretch of the imagination, as FCR doesn't own the land it needs to construct it and, according to the developer, it's undergoing an extensive redesign. The proposed affordable housing is nowhere in sight and construction is highly unlikely to start in 2009, if ever.

The use of stimulus funds for this project birthed in opaque backrooms, and laden with non-competitive and no-bid contracts, would violate the bill's accountability provisions requiring a transparent and competitive bidding process before contracts could be entered into. Atlantic Yards failed that test a long time ago.

Using the federal funds for Atlantic Yards would seriously undermine the stimulus package and expose it to widespread ridicule. The intent of the bill is to generate jobs and kick-start the economy, not bail out and further prop up a private developer's failed project — the Troubled Assets Relief Program (TARP) took that approach and look where it got us. TARP was about rewarding bad behavior; the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act isn't. Yet a closed-door effort is underway to convince New York Governor David Paterson that an Atlantic Yards bailout is a state priority.

Before the Ratner lobbying effort geared up, the state issued its 60-page wishlist of more than 1,900 priority projects in need of stimulus money. Atlantic Yards was not on that list. If Atlantic Yards eventually receive stimulus funds, we'll know it was not due to any stated need or on the merits of the project, but rather on pork-scented cronyism.

Daniel Goldstein is a co-founder of Develop Don't Destroy Brooklyn (develop-dontdestroy.org).

Take Action!

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Sen. Chuck Schumer
(202) 224-6542 (D.C. Office)

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand
NYC Office not open at press time
(202) 224-4451 (D.C. Office)



GOING STRONG: Brooklyn residents have been battling the Atlantic Yards development for five years and now hope new stimulus funds will not revive the project. PHOTO: FLICKR.COM

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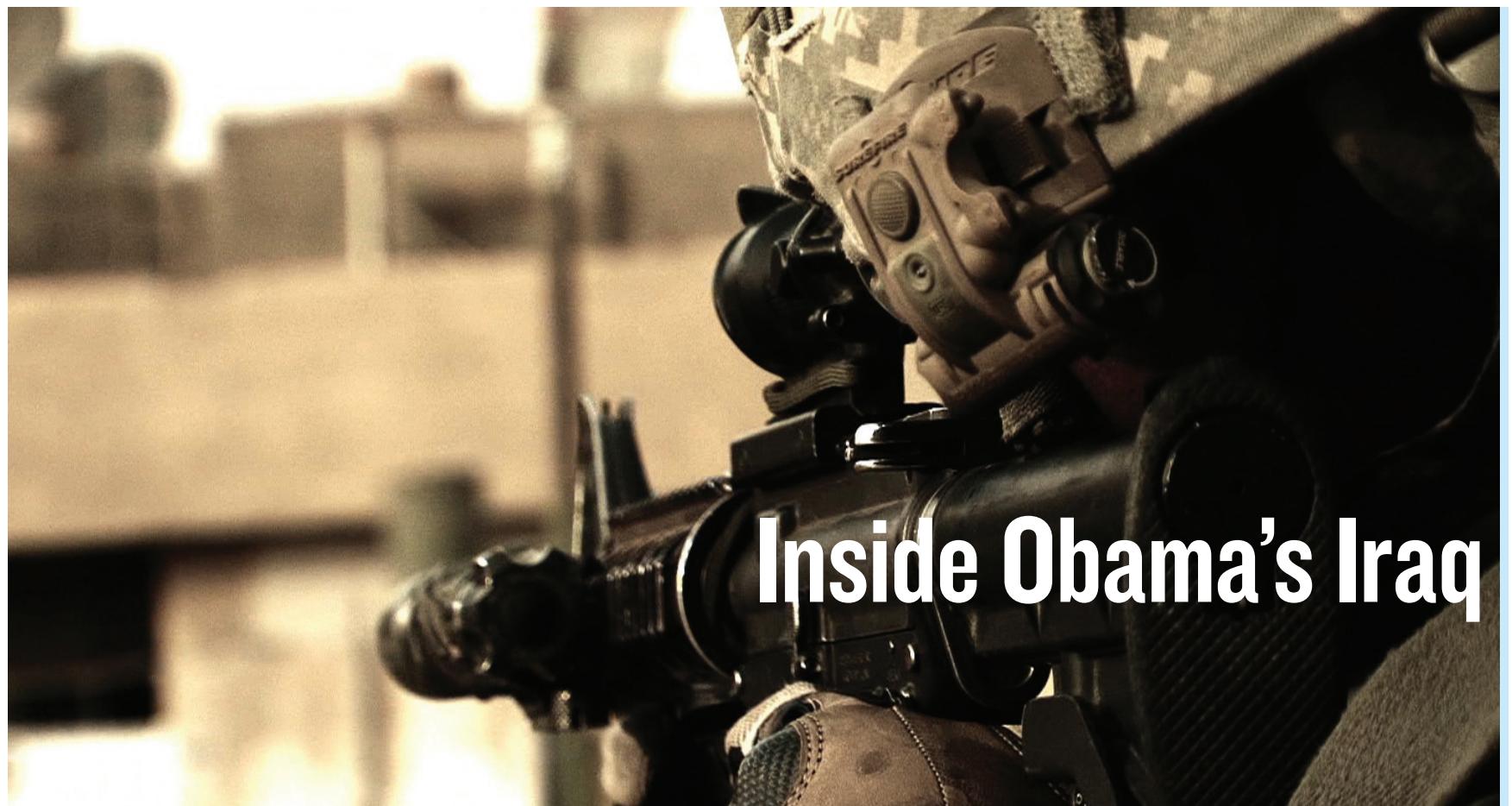
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Inside Obama's Iraq

PHOTOS BY RICK ROWLEY.
ALL WERE TAKEN DURING AN
UNEMBEDDED TOUR OF IRAQ
IN JANUARY 2009.

DEMOCRACY AT THE BARREL OF A GUN:

A U.S. soldier watches over Sadr City, a Shiite slum of 2 million people in northeast Baghdad that has been the scene of some of the fiercest fighting during the Iraq War.

Facing page, from top to bottom:
IRAQI COURT, AMERICAN JUDGES:
An Iraqi detainee appears before U.S. military judges at Camp Cropper in Baghdad. An estimated 10,000 Iraqis are currently held in U.S.-run prison camps.

DAILY LIFE: A young girl in Sadr City.

A DIVIDED CITY: A convoy of hulking U.S. military vehicles makes its way through Sadr City. Baghdad's roads and neighborhoods are partitioned by miles of blast walls.

MUQTADA: Supporters of Shiite cleric Muqtada Al-Sadr carry his portrait through the streets of Sadr City. Al-Sadr continues to be a fierce critic of the U.S. occupation.

The populist movement he leads is demanding that the United States honor a recent agreement to withdraw all its forces from the country by the end of 2011.

BY DAVID ENDERS

vided ample evidence that, while violence is at a comparative lull, attacks still occur.

SABAA AL BOR, Iraq—At the height of sectarian fighting two years ago, Sunni militias fired hundreds of mortars each day on parts of this mostly Shiite village nine miles northwest of Baghdad, driving nearly all of its estimated 50,000 residents outside Iraq or to other parts of the country.

"My house was destroyed and my son was kidnapped and killed," says Abbas Fadhl, a Shiite imam accused of being a militia leader by Sunni insurgents. He left the city in 2006 and returned in 2007.

"There is reconciliation between the two sides," Fadhl says, but reintegration has not taken place. "Shops and houses are still destroyed — more from the Shiites, but also from the Sunnis."

On one street corner, I asked the half-dozen men standing there how many of them had lost an immediate relative — all claimed they had. Some raised shirts to show shrapnel wounds, ranging from light scarring to horrific gashes that appeared impossible to survive.

This sort of low-intensity violence could go on for years. The soldiers I was with speculated that the bomb they disarmed was homemade, having been wired for detonation with a cheap camera flash and 150 feet of copper wire. It had been buried in some garbage beneath a billboard depicting smiling Iraqis embracing members of the new Iraqi army.

CITY OF WALLS

According to author and former Marine Bing West, Iraq is the first vehicle-based insurgency. The U.S. military's solution has been to build 100 miles of concrete walls and turn many Baghdad neighborhoods into easily controlled districts with one exit and entrance. The partitioning of more than half the city has also created sectarian enclaves in what were once mixed neighborhoods. It is unclear when most of the walls will come down, and for the moment, more are being built than are being removed.

In Sadr City, one of the last neighborhoods in Baghdad to be walled off, U.S. Capt. Andrew Slack of the 1st Armored Division estimates his soldiers have built around three miles of walls in their sector, and continue to build them, though at a slower pace than before.

"We have not taken any down," Slack says.

"God only knows how many walls there are in Baghdad," said Mohammed Askari, a spokesman for the Ministry of Defense, when asked to provide a number. "They bring these walls every day and put them in streets."

Fearing expulsion from Baghdad, Sunnis formed security teams known by a variety of names, such as the Awakening, Concerned Local Citizens and Sons of Iraq, and embraced the U.S. Army for protection and patronage against their Shiite rivals, whom they claim are supported by Iran.

LOW-INTENSITY WAR

Iraq remains dangerous. During a two-week trip in mid-January, I still frequently heard explosions. Reporting trips around Baghdad and its outskirts pro-

FIGHTING HAS DIED DOWN BUT THE OCCUPATION GRINDS ON

main a stopgap measure, rather than a solution. In Sleikh, a northern Baghdad neighborhood that is mostly Sunni, local "Sahwa" (which means Awakening) commander Abu Waleed pointed to a closed bridge that separated his neighborhood from a nearby Iraqi and U.S. Army base.

"They opened this 10 days ago," says Abu Waleed (a pseudonym), a former member of Saddam Hussein's security forces. "Five days later, a bomb exploded, so they closed it again."

The Sons of Iraq might have helped decrease the violence in the short term, but decommissioning these paramilitaries will be difficult. According to Abu Waleed, the police and the army have incorporated between 5 and 10 percent of the Sons of Iraq, far fewer than the approximately 20 percent of the estimated 100,000 militia members that the Iraqi government had promised to retain.

He added that the members who have not been officially incorporated into security forces have not been paid, which the Iraqi government agreed to do.

"People are beginning to quit," Abu Waleed says. "We demand that the Iraqi government pay attention to the Sons of Iraq, because they took part in securing the neighborhoods and take care of those who quit their jobs."

There are also questions about how removed the Sahwa really are from the U.S. military. The assistant of one Sahwa commander in Anbar recently bragged to a reporter that contracts were coming directly from the U.S. military, deliberately circumventing the Iraqi government. Such contracts, generally for construction projects, have been used to fund local militias since 2007.

Askari of the Ministry of Defense denies this.

"On the issue of the Sahwa, since two months ago, all the Sahwa forces were transferred to the Iraqi government and they are paid from the Iraqi government," Askari said.

Another point of contention is the Iraqis that are still being held prisoner by the United States. Though U.S. forces have released more than 10,000 Iraqis in the last year, more than 10,000 others are still being held. Askari said that the turnover of prisoners is supposed to begin in July and be completed by the time the United States pulls out.

STATUS OF THE OCCUPATION

Under the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) between the Iraqi and U.S. governments last November, all U.S. military forces are slated to leave Iraq by Dec. 31, 2011, nearly nine years after the war began.

Iraqis on the street tend to see the SOFA as a document that the two governments will have to be forced to implement.

"Their presence is reduced," said Umm Teeba, a teacher living in Saidia, in south Baghdad. "But on



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Speakers include members of the organizations Iraq Veterans Against the War, United for Peace and Justice and *The Independent*.

INTERNATIONAL PROTESTS GROW OVER ECONOMIC CRISIS

Protests over the economic crisis continue to escalate across the globe. In Britain, police are preparing for a "summer of rage" as concern grows of rioting unemployed workers and foreclosed homeowners. In Ireland, up to 120,000 people took part in a union-led demonstration Feb. 21 to protest the government's handling of the crisis. On Feb. 20, Latvia's Prime Minister resigned following Latvia's largest protests since the fall of the Soviet Union. Mass protests have also occurred in the neighboring Baltic states, Estonia and Lithuania. Workers in the French Caribbean island of Guadeloupe have engaged in a month-long general strike because current wages are not enough to stave off rising living costs, high unemployment and poverty.

LATIN AMERICAN LEADERS: U.S. "DRUG WAR" HAS FAILED

Three former Latin American presidents have declared the U.S. "war on drugs" a failure and claim it is threatening the future of Colombia, Mexico and other nations. "Prohibitionist policies based on eradication, interdiction and criminalization of consumption simply haven't worked. Violence and the organized crime associated with the narcotics trade remain critical problems in our countries," wrote former Brazilian president Henrique Cardoso, former Colombian president Cesar Gaviria and former Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed Feb. 23. The former leaders are urging the United States and other nations to increase youth public education campaigns about drugs, to treat addicts as patients instead of criminals and to consider decriminalizing marijuana possession.

FRIENDS ONCE AGAIN

The Central Asian nation of Uzbekistan has agreed to allow U.S. and NATO forces to send military supplies through the country en route to Afghanistan. The deal was reached after Kyrgyzstan evicted the United States from a key military base, shutting down a key supply route. The Obama administration is renewing military ties with Uzbekistan, despite the nation's abysmal human rights record. On Feb. 25, the U.S. Department of State admitted in a new report that Uzbekistan was an authoritarian state where human rights activists and journalists were frequently jailed, tortured and forced into psychiatric treatment. Last July, Uzbek police reportedly poured boiling water on the back of one human rights activist in an attempt to elicit a confession.

SPIRALING CLIMATE CHANGE

A leading climate scientist is warning the effects of global warming are accelerating at a much faster pace than previously projected. "We are basically looking now at a future climate that's beyond anything we've considered seriously in climate model simulations," said Christopher Field of the Carnegie Institution's Department of Global Ecology at Stanford University. Field said the 2007 report by the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change had seriously underestimated the increase in global warming because it failed to consider the widespread adoption of coal-powered energy in countries like China and India. On Feb. 25, Field testified before Congress and warned global warming could turn the southwest United States into a wasteland. "With severe drought from California to Oklahoma, a broad swath of the south-west is basically robbed of having a sustainable lifestyle," Field said.

VENEZUELA VOTERS TOSS TERM LIMITS

Chávez Ready to Run in 2012 on Promise of 21st Century Socialism

BY GREGORY WILPERT

The decisive victory (55 to 45 percent) that President Hugo Chávez and his movement achieved Feb. 15 in favor of amending Venezuela's constitution so that Chávez may run for president again in 2012, represents an important victory for the effort to create socialism in this oil-producing Latin American nation.

However, this victory comes with a certain degree of risk because it increases the Bolivarian movement's dependency on its charismatic leader. Even though Chávez is the best guarantor for progressive social change in Venezuela today, his movement's dependency on him was exacerbated by the referendum victory.

WHAT THE VICTORY MEANS

Given the importance of Chávez for leading the Bolivarian project to its conclusion, the Feb. 15 victory is extremely important for Venezuela and for creating a real progressive alternative to capitalist democracy as usual.

As the sociologist Max Weber pointed out about 100 years ago, there are times when charismatic leaders are necessary to break through the ossified social institutions in order to create something new. Examples of this type of charismatic leadership would be Lenin, Mao, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., or Nelson Mandela. This is not to say that Chávez is on a par with these leaders in every respect, but he probably is with respect to his ability to lead and inspire. And such leadership should not be wasted if a people democratically decide that the cost of losing such leadership far outweighs the possible benefit of maintaining term limits.

The recent referendum victory becomes all the more important if we consider that the world is currently entering its worst economic crisis since the Great Depression 80 years ago. In that era, people were desperate for an alternative to capitalism and there is no reason to believe that a similar development will not take place this time around. Viable alternatives to capitalism, whether under the heading of 21st century socialism or some other name, will become increasingly important. For better or worse, Chávez has become one of the few leaders in today's world to forge a path in this direction.

However, the Bolivarian movement's



PRESIDENT HUGO CHÁVEZ. PHOTO: B. LONDON

dependency on Chávez makes it somewhat fragile. If anything were to happen to Chávez, the movement would probably fall apart into its component parts in no time. Given this fragility, questioning the leader is quite difficult because criticism rapidly threatens to undermine the movement's stability and main strength. As a result, debate within the movement tends to be possible as long as it does not question the leader's decisions or opinions. This, in turn, makes movement self-criticism difficult and makes the potential for errors greater.

TASKS FOR THE NEXT PERIOD

One of the first tasks for the Bolivarian movement is that it must continue to develop the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) the successor to the coalition of Left parties that originally brought Chávez to power. A strong PSUV would enable the Bolivarian movement to become less dependent on Chávez and more stable and more open to wide-ranging debate. This means developing alternate leaders and strengthening party structures so that the whole party is more movement-driven and less leader-dependent.

Second, as Chávez himself recognized during his victory speech, his government must take the fight against insecurity and Venezuela's high crime rate far more seriously. The government needs to complement poverty reduction with other measures in order to reduce crime. Along with the fight against crime also belongs the general fight against corruption and increasing the state's efficiency and effectiveness.

Third, with the price of oil declining, Chávez's government will have to find ways to strengthen its efforts to create social justice with less oil revenue. This would probably either mean going into debt so as to stave off a recession and/or taxing the country's rich far more heavily.

Finally, the fourth outstanding task for

the next period is the deepening of participatory democracy against the resistance of Chavismo's mid-level managers: the ministries, mayors and governors. If popular power, as the system of direct democratic communal councils is often known, is the heart of Bolivarian socialist democracy, then this will be the true testing ground for the viability of an alternative to capitalist democracy.

So far, the communal councils have achieved much, but only in their own localities of 200 to 400 families. The real challenge, which Chávez has repeatedly announced, but which has yet to happen, is to bring these structures to a higher level, to the municipalities and perhaps even to state and national level. However, as many have observed, this is going to be difficult because few mayors and governors are willing to let go of their power.

If Chávez and his movement manage to tackle these four tasks in the next two to four years, then the future of Bolivarian socialism will be bright indeed. Even though Chávez won this referendum, the upcoming period is going to be quite short because if these tasks are not tackled successfully before the end of 2010, then Chávez faces the real possibility of losing his two-thirds majority in the National Assembly, or perhaps even his 50 percent majority, which would be a devastating blow.

If things should go very wrong, such as if the economy were to crash for some reason (this does not seem likely, but cannot be discounted), then Chávez could even face a recall referendum in 2010. Should he weather these hurdles, though, the next real test will be the presidential election in late 2012.

The term limit referendum bought Chávez and his movement more time to complete the Bolivarian socialist revolution. However, Chávez must deliver significant change in a relatively short amount of time if this project is to succeed in the long term.

*This article was adapted from a longer version that originally appeared on venezuelanalysis.com. Gregory Wilpert is the author of the book, *Changing Venezuela by Taking Power: The History and Policies of the Chávez Government* (Verso, 2007).*

Asia: The Coming Fury

By WALDEN BELLO

As goods pile up in wharves from Bangkok to Shanghai, and workers are laid off in record numbers, people in East Asia are beginning to realize they aren't only experiencing an economic downturn but living through the end of an era.

For more than 40 years now, the cutting edge of the region's economy has been export-oriented industrialization (EOI). Taiwan and South Korea first adopted this strategy of growth in the mid-1960s, with South Korean dictator Park Chung-Hee coaxing his country's entrepreneurs to export by, among other measures, cutting off electricity to their factories if they refused to comply.

The success of South Korea and Taiwan convinced the World Bank that EOI was the wave of the future. In the mid-1970s, then-Bank President Robert McNamara enshrined it as doctrine, preaching that "special efforts must be made in many countries to turn their manufacturing enterprises away from the relatively small markets associated with import substitution toward the much larger opportunities flowing from export promotion."

EOI became one of the key points of consensus between the Bank and Southeast Asia's governments. Both realized import substitution industrialization could only continue if domestic purchasing power were increased via significant redistribution of income and wealth, and this was simply out of the question for the region's elites. Export markets, especially the relatively open U.S. market, appeared to be a painless substitute.

JAPANESE CAPITAL CREATES AN EXPORT PLATFORM

The World Bank endorsed the establishment of export processing zones, where foreign capital could be married to cheap (usually female) labor. It also supported the establishment of tax incentives for exporters and, less successfully, promoted trade liberalization. Not until the mid-1980s, however, did the economies of Southeast Asia take off, and this wasn't so much because of the Bank but because of aggressive U.S. trade policy. In 1985, in what became known as the Plaza Accord, the United States forced the drastic revaluation of the Japanese yen relative to the dollar and other major currencies. By making Japanese imports more expensive to American consumers, Washington hoped to reduce its trade deficit with Tokyo. Production in Japan became prohibitive in terms of labor costs, forcing the Japanese to move the more labor-intensive parts of their manufacturing operations to low-wage areas, in particular to China and Southeast Asia. At least \$15 billion worth of Japanese direct investment flowed into Southeast Asia between 1985 and 1990.

The inflow of Japanese capital allowed the Southeast Asian "newly industrializing countries" to escape the credit squeeze of the early 1980s brought on by the Third World debt crisis, surmount the global recession of the mid-1980s, and move onto a path of high-speed growth. The centrality of the *endaka*, or currency revaluation, was reflected in the ratio of foreign direct investment inflows to

gross capital formation, which leaped spectacularly in the late 1980s and 1990s in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand.

The dynamics of foreign-investment-driven growth was best illustrated in Thailand, which received \$24 billion worth of investment from capital-rich Japan, Korea, and Taiwan in just five years, between 1987 and 1991. Whatever might have been the Thai government's economic policy preferences — protectionist, mercantilist, or pro-market — this vast amount of East Asian capital coming into Thailand could not do anything but trigger rapid growth. The same was true in the two other favored nations of northeast Asian capital, Malaysia and Indonesia.

It wasn't just the scale of Japanese investment over a five-year period that mattered, however; it was the process. The Japanese government and *keiretsu*, or conglomerates, planned and cooperated closely in the transfer of corporate industrial facilities to Southeast Asia. One key dimension of this plan was to relocate not just big corporations like Toyota or Matsushita, but also small and medium enterprises that provided their inputs and components.

CHINA MASTERS THE MODEL

If Taiwan and Korea pioneered the model and Southeast Asia successfully followed in their wake, China perfected the strategy of export-oriented industrialization. With its reserve army of cheap labor unmatched by any country in the world, China became the "workshop of the world," drawing in \$50 billion in foreign investment annually by the first half of this decade. To survive, transnational firms had no choice but to transfer their labor-intensive operations to China to take advantage of what came to be known as the "China price," provoking in the process a tremendous crisis in the advanced capitalist countries' labor forces.

This process depended on the U.S. market. As long as U.S. consumers splurged, the export economies of East Asia could continue in high gear. The low U.S. savings rate was no barrier since credit was available on a grand scale. China and other Asian countries snapped up U.S. treasury bills and loaned massively to U.S. financial institutions, which in turn loaned to consumers and homebuyers. But now the U.S. credit economy has imploded, and the U.S. market is unlikely to serve as the same dynamic source of demand for a long time to come. As a result, Asia's export economies have been marooned.

THE ILLUSION OF "DECOUPLING"

For several years China has seemed to be a dynamic alternative to the U.S. market for Japan and East Asia's smaller economies. Chinese demand, after all, had pulled the Asian economies, including Korea and Japan, from the depths of stagnation and the morass of the Asian financial crisis in the first half of this decade. In 2003, for instance, Japan broke a decade-long stagnation by meeting China's thirst for capital and technology-intensive goods. Japanese exports shot up to record levels. Indeed, China had become by the middle of the decade, "the overwhelming driver of export growth in Taiwan and the



TIM DURNING

Philippines, and the majority buyer of products from Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, and Australia."

Even though China appeared to be a new driver of export-led growth, some analysts still considered the notion of Asia "decoupling" from the U.S. locomotive to be a pipe dream. For instance, research by economists C.P. Chandrasekhar and Jayati Ghosh underlined that China was indeed importing intermediate goods and parts from Japan, South Korea and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, but only to put them together mainly for export as finished goods to the United States and Europe, not for its domestic market. Thus, "if demand for Chinese exports from the United States and the EU [European Union] slow down, as will be likely with a U.S. recession," they asserted, "this will not only affect Chinese manufacturing production, but also Chinese demand for imports from these Asian developing countries."

The collapse of Asia's key market has banished all talk of decoupling. The image of decoupled locomotives — one coming to a halt, the other chugging along on a separate track — no longer applies, if it ever had. Rather, U.S.-East Asia economic relations today resemble a chain-gang linking not only China and the United States but a host of other satellite economies. They are all linked to debt-financed middle-class spending in the United States, which has collapsed.

China's growth in 2008 fell to 9 percent, from 11 percent a year earlier. Japan is now in deep recession, its mighty export-oriented consumer goods industries reeling from plummeting sales. South Korea, the hardest hit of Asia's economies so far, has seen its currency collapse by some 30 percent relative to the dollar. Southeast Asia's growth in 2009 will likely be half that of 2008.

THE COMING FURY

The sudden end of the export era is going to have some ugly consequences. In the last three

decades, rapid growth reduced the number living below the poverty line in many countries. In practically all countries, however, income and wealth inequality increased. But the expansion of consumer purchasing power took much of the edge off social conflicts. Now, with the era of growth coming to an end, increasing poverty amid great inequalities will be a combustible combination.

In China, about 20 million workers have lost their jobs in the last few months, many of them heading back to the countryside, where they will find little work. The authorities are rightly worried that what they label "mass group incidents," which have been increasing in the last decade, might spin out of control. With the safety valve of foreign demand for Indonesian and Filipino workers shut off, hundreds of thousands of workers are returning home to few jobs and dying farms. Suffering is likely to be accompanied by rising protest, as it already has in Vietnam, where strikes are spreading like wildfire. South Korea, with its tradition of militant labor and peasant protest, is a ticking time bomb. Indeed, East Asia may be entering a period of radical protest and social revolution that went out of style when export-oriented industrialization became the fashion three decades ago.

This article was adapted from an article originally published in Foreign Policy In Focus. Walden Bello is a senior analyst at Global South and president of the Freedom from Debt Coalition.

For More Online:

Workers in China are left in an uncomfortable pivot, stuck between unemployment in the cities and left without a life back in their home villages. Read Smriti Rao's article about the swell of uncertainty, "China: Looking Inwards," online at indypendent.org.

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH EVENTS

SAT MARCH 7, 7:30PM
EXHIBIT OPENING: Ocean Anna Rising Presents: Refuge and Resistance.

MUSIC: Afro Latino Cafe presents: Seknosa Jazz: All Women Music Ensemble

FRI MARCH 20, 7:30PM
FILM: *The Mist* with director Maryam Habbibian & Kathleen Foster

TUES MARCH 24, 7:30PM
COMMUNITY FORUM: Hip-hop and Feminism

WED MARCH 25, 7:30PM
EVENT: The Octavia Butler Project



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Racial Profiling

Continued from page 3

A subsequent federal investigation concluded the NYPD's Street Crimes Unit engaged in racial profiling. Public pressure forced the city to officially ban the practice. As part of a case filed by the CCR in response to the Diallo killing, the NYPD was required to keep stop-and-frisk data.

A new lawsuit, *Floyd v. The City of New York*, was filed in January 2008, and in September a federal judge ordered the police to release all of the past 10 years worth of stop-and-frisk data.

"The vast majority of stops are police initiated," said CCR Staff Attorney Darius Charney. "Police are in certain neighborhoods and on their own initiative they decide to stop someone." Charney also said that police data shows the least common reason for an NYPD stop was encountering an individual who fit a description of a suspect.

While Charney states that he doesn't "want to assume bad intentions on the part of the police," he argues that, "whatever the motivation, profiling is simply not an effective crime fighting strategy. And its continued use is building

a lot of distrust in between police and community."

Barron believes that the latest stop-and-frisk revelations highlight Mayor Michael Bloomberg's failings as a city leader.

"Bloomberg has a protectionist policy," Barron said. "It allows his commissioner to violate the law without reprimanding him or changing policies. The police have set up 'impact zones' and Bloomberg has allowed for police containment and harassment instead of job creation or

economic development. He chooses to build more prisons and increase police presence while denying economic job creation — 40 to 50 percent of black men in New York City are unemployed."

The CCR report recommends the NYPD enforce existing reporting requirements and that the city

expand the power and the scope of the Civilian Complaint Review Board, which currently investigates complaints of police misconduct, but has no enforcement powers.

For the full CCR report, see ccrjustice.org/criminal-justice-and-mass-incarceration.

Obama Rescues Banks

Continued from page 3

Beginning in 2002, mortgage-backed securities became the darling of Wall Street. HSBC, the subprime giant, issued or underwrote \$200 billion in securities backed by subprime lending between 2002 and 2006. Deutsche Bank underwrote \$120 billion in that same time period. Citigroup's share was \$166 billion, according to a 2008 lawsuit the city of Cleveland, Ohio, filed against predatory lenders.

By 2003, Wall Street was aggressively searching for borrowers who would accept subprime mortgages because the rate of return was so much higher than from conforming 30-year fixed-rate mortgages that required a down payment.

"The big demand was not so much on the part of the borrowers as it was on the part of the suppliers who were giving loans which really most people couldn't afford," said then-U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan. "We created something which was unsustainable. If it weren't for securitization, the subprime loan market would have been much smaller."

But reviving cramdown would allow 8.1 million homeowners who are likely to face foreclosure in the next five years to remain in their homes and pay back only what the house is actually worth. Unlike Obama's plan, it would not cost the government a penny. And if the legislation even looked like it had a chance of passing, it would open

the floodgates to true, sustainable voluntary mortgage modification, outside of bankruptcy. Consider this: as of October 2008, only 3.5 percent of delinquent subprime loans were voluntarily reformed by lenders. One professor who studied the issue found that of 3.5 million modifications, less than one-third actually lowered the monthly payment. Two-thirds kept the payments the same, or increased them, to cover missed payments. The result is re-default. It is only the threat of judicial modification that forces the lender to be reasonable.

Since the Wall Street bailout, Citigroup has said it would accept cramdown, provided it was only applied retroactively. It wants assurances that it can issue new mortgages that would not become subject to judicial modification. The other subprime lending giant banks, Wells Fargo, Bank of America and JPMorgan Chase, have not dropped their opposition.

In his Feb. 18 announcement, President Obama called upon Congress to amend the bankruptcy law to permit cramdown for underwater homeowners. Only cramdown would begin to restore a measure of the ill-gotten gains that Wall Street acquired at the expense of Black and Latino homeowners who were the primary victims of the subprime scam.

The People's Lawyer is a project of the NYC chapter of the National Lawyers Guild (nlgnyc.org).

No More Blank Check for Israel!

CAMPAIGN FOR PEACE AND DEMOCRACY STATEMENT ON THE CRISIS IN GAZA

The statement below was written in early January, during Israel's savage attack on Gaza. At this writing there is a fragile cease-fire, but even if it holds, the statement retains its relevance and urgency. Israel may have won a kind of military "victory," insofar as it has re-asserted its military dominance, but the worldwide outrage at its shocking massacre of innocent people constitutes a political and moral defeat of immense proportions. And even though major fighting has stopped, for the time being, the economic blockade — a deadly and flagrantly illegal collective punishment of Gaza — continues. It must be lifted. CPD rejects Hamas's reactionary social agenda, but that has no bearing on our determination to oppose Israeli aggression and end U.S. complicity. There will be no peace, either for Palestine or Israel, until the Israeli occupation is ended and the Palestinian people win their right to independence and security. For this to occur, we must end the U.S. military and political support that facilitates Israel's cruel — and ultimately self-destructive — policies.

To add your name, to contribute to publicizing the statement, or to see the full list of signers and more discussion of the issue, go to the Campaign for Peace and Democracy website, www.cpdweb.org

—Joanne Landy, Thomas Harrison,
Stephen Shalom, Jesse Lemisch,
Campaign for Peace and Democracy,
January 29, 2009

IN ITS MASSIVE MILITARY attacks on Gaza, Israel has again engaged in actions contrary to morality, international law, the cause of peace, and to the long-term best interests of the people of Israel. And, once again, the United States government has been the enabler of Israeli actions:

- The bombers that unleashed death and destruction on Gaza were U.S.-supplied F-16s.
- The attack helicopters were U.S.-supplied Apaches.
- The government that blocked international demands for an immediate cease-fire was Washington.
- And the source of more than \$3 billion a year in tax-payer funded military aid to Israel has been the United States.

No country should have to face rockets fired at its citizens,

SELECTED LIST OF SIGNERS FROM THE 1200+ SIGNATURES THAT HAVE COME IN TO DATE (for the full list as it evolves, go to www.cpdweb.org)

Ervand Abrahamian, Janet Afary, Jean-Christophe Agnew, Michael Albert, Kevin Anderson, Bettina Aptheker, Anthony Arnove, Stanley Aronowitz, David Barsamian, Rosalyn Baxandall, Phyllis Bennis, Michael Bérubé, Norman Birnbaum, Eileen Boris, Philip Bosco, Jeremy Brecher, Stephen Eric Bronner, Vinie Burrows, Roane Carey, Noam Chomsky, Bogdan Denitch, Manuela Dobos, Ariel Dorfman, Martin Duberman, Carolyn Eisenberg, Hester Eisenstein, Jethro Eisenstein, Zillah Eisenstein, Daniel Ellsberg, Gertrude Ezorsky, Samuel Farber, John Feffer, Bruce Gagnon, Irene Gendzler, Jill Godmilow, Arun Gupta, Thomas Harrison, David Harvey, Nader Hashemi, Howie Hawkins, Chris Hedges, Michael Hirsch, Adam Hochschild, Nancy Holmstrom, Doug Ireland, Tony Judt, Jan Kavan, Alice Kessler-Harris, Kathy F. Kelly, Assaf Kfoury, Joanne Landy, Jesse Lemisch, Sue Leonard, Mark LeVine, Nelson Lichtenstein, Zachary Lockman, Mohammed Mamdani, Betty Mandell, Marvin Mandell, Dave Marsh, Scott McLemee, David McReynolds, Ali Moazzami, Claire Moses, Molly Nolan, David Oakford, Carl Oglesby, Bertell Ollman, Martin Oppenheimer, Rosalind Petchesky, Christopher Phelps, Charlotte Phillips MD, Katha Pollitt, Danny Postel, Vijay Prashad, Peter Rachleff, Sonia Robbins, Gordon Rogoff, Matthew Rothschild, Jennifer Scarlott, Jay Schaffner, Jason Schulman, Sonia Shah, Stephen Shalom, Adam Shatz, Wallace Shawn, Alice Slater, Stephen Soldz, Norman Solomon, Stephen Steinberg, David Swanson, Peter Tatchell, Chris Toensing, Lois Weiner, Thomas Weisskopf, Naomi Weissstein, Reginald Wilson, Lawrence Wittner, Kent Worcester, Michael Wreszin, Marilyn B. Young, Stephen Zunes

and we condemn Hamas's launching of rockets into Israeli civilian areas. But the solution is not raining bombs and missiles down on one of the most densely populated sites in the world, making massive civilian casualties inevitable, and which, apart from its immorality, guarantees only another generation of hatred towards Israel.

The solution — as the Israeli peace movement, human rights groups, and the United Nations have urged — is to lift the economic blockade imposed on Gaza and end the Occupation.

This blockade holds one and a half million Palestinian civilians hostage, and creates a horrendous humanitarian crisis. Malnutrition is rife, people have died from being denied the right to travel for medical care, and electricity and clean water are scarce. Meanwhile the 40-year Occupation not only continues, but is also strengthened by increased settlements.

We condemn the policies of our government that support the ongoing oppression and murder of the Palestinian people.

We urge the Obama administration to refuse to give Israel the U.S. blank check it has long enjoyed.

And we call on everyone to join in telling the President and Congress that we want an immediate end to U.S. military aid to Israel. We do not want our tax dollars or the leaders who speak in our names to continue supporting the attacks on the Palestinian people.

This statement is being sent to President Obama, Secretary of State Clinton, and Middle East envoy George Mitchell.

CPD Campaign for Peace and Democracy

Please add my name to the list of signers to the CPD "No Blank Check for Israel!" You may use my name when the statement is published.
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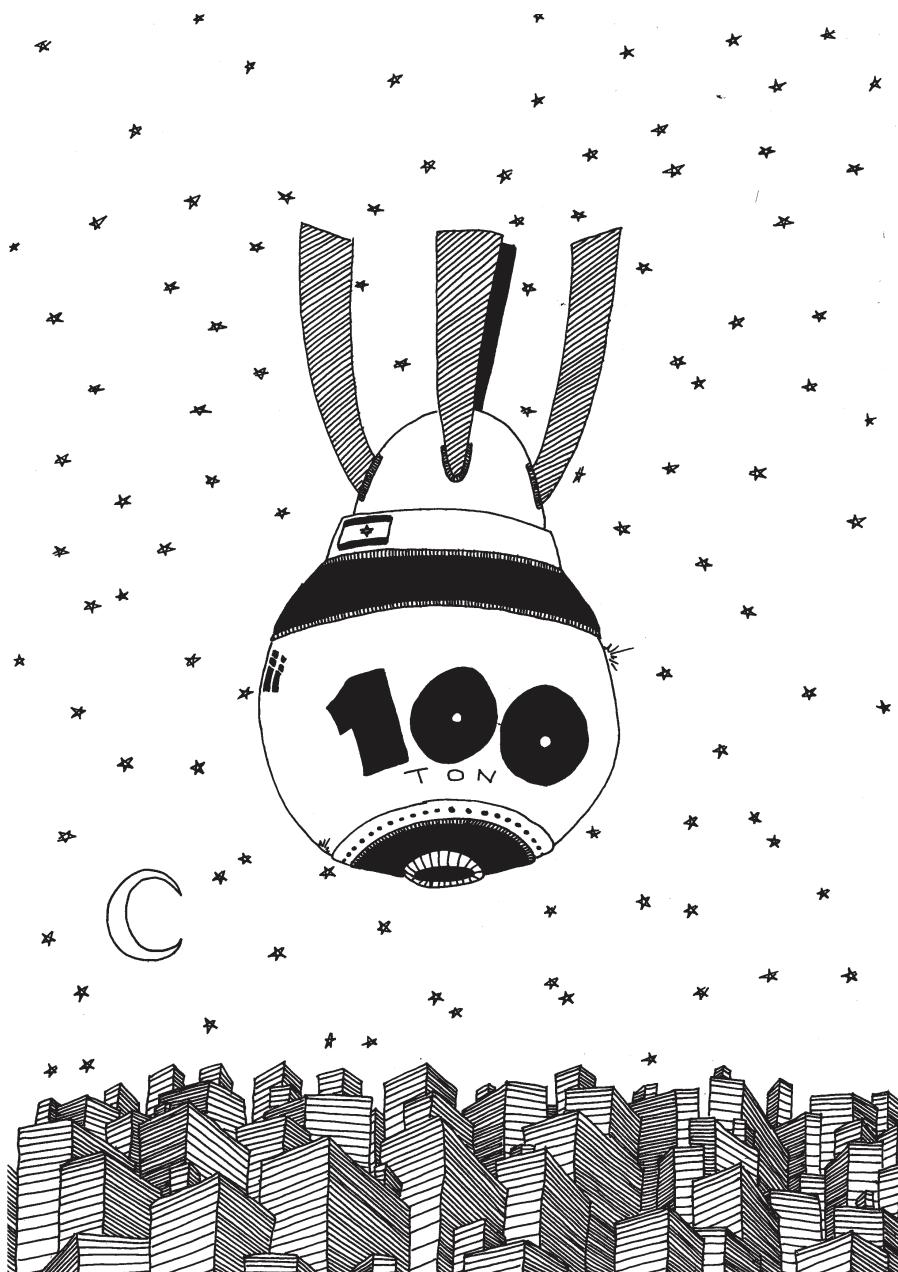
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Artists Juxtapose a World of Dispossession

MATERIAL FOR A FILM (2004-)
AND
MATERIAL FOR A FILM
(PERFORMANCE) (2006)
BY EMILY JACIR
GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Through April 15

MUSEUM AS HUB BECOMING DUTCH:
"EXODUS 2048"
BY MICHAEL BLUM
NEW MUSEUM
Through March 29

The ongoing conflict between Israelis and Palestinians has recently found an outlet in the gallery world. Israeli artist Michael Blum's futuristic installation *Exodus 2048*, currently at the New Museum, and the highly acclaimed Palestinian-American artist Emily Jacir's commemoration of slain Palestinian artist and intellectual Wael Zuater at the Guggenheim, catapult the viewer into a world of dispossession and dislocation. Both evoke cultural and political oppression, themes all too common to the Palestinian and Jewish experience.

Due to the high birthrates among Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, and Israeli Arabs, combined they are projected to outnumber Israeli Jews by 2025. One possible outcome of this "demographic problem," explored in *Exodus 2048*, is the Arab Israelis' overthrow of the Jewish state and the forced migration of the Israelis.

The world Blum creates includes a new Jewish state in Uganda, Israel's government in exile in Brooklyn, and the refugee ship *Exodus 2048*, which wanders the seas for months before finally being accepted by the Dutch government. The exhibit depicts a refugee camp in a museum in the Netherlands where 150 of the boat's passengers find shelter.

The exhibit opens with six text panels chronicling the events from Dec. 26, 2047, the start of the Arab uprising, to the end of the state of Israel five months later.

Viewers can sneak a peek through curtains into a refugee camp scene. The room is jammed with cots and bunk beds and the floor strewn with personal belongings, newspapers, children's toys, open bags of potato chips, spilled coffee, dirty rags, shopping carts full of bags and clothes. Televisions pump out Hebrew language programming and the radios blare Israeli music.

Jacir's two-part exhibition, which won the Guggenheim's 2008 Hugo Boss prize, resurfaces the life and work of Zuater, a Palestinian born in Nablus who lived much of his life in exile as an artist and served as a spokesperson for the Palestine Liberation Organization. He was assassinated by Mossad agents in Rome in 1972 for his alleged association with Black September, the group responsible for the murder of 11 Israeli Olympians in that year's Mu-

nich Games. No evidence has been offered linking him to the attacks, and by many accounts Zuater was dedicated to nonviolence.

The exhibit includes personal effects from Zuater: postcards he wrote to his girlfriend Janet, photos of him with family and friends, and photos of places that he frequented. It also brings Zuater to life through audio recordings of him translating his writings from Arabic to Italian and conversations captured by Italian police wiretaps. When Zuater was killed, he was carrying a

copy of *1,001 Arabian Nights* (his life's ambition was to translate the work into Italian). One of the bullets was lodged in the spine of the novel. Jacir devotes a room to displaying 1,000 blank books with bullet holes, which she shot with a .22 caliber pistol, similar to that which took Zuater's life.

According to a friend of Zuater, "his ultimate goal was the reconciliation of the Jews with the Palestinians." The violent elimination and marginalization of moderate and progressive voices has had a deep impact on the Pal-

estinian national struggle. As the exhibit points out, the world will never know Zuater's opinion of Hamas, the Islamist movement that was founded more than a decade after his death.

Blum's work obviously invokes the plight of displaced Palestinians, especially the hundreds of thousands who have lived in refugee camps for decades. Another reference to the conflict comes from a fictitious Jewish leader who vows before leaving Israel, "You shouldn't consider our escape as treason or cowardice, but as a strategic retreat

while preparing for the next battle." These words could have come from the mouth of any number of Arab leaders throughout the last 60 years of defeats.

South African intellectual and anti-apartheid activist Breyten Breytenbach has noted that "No two peoples are as similar and have as much of a shared commonality as the Israelis and the Palestinians." These exhibits provide a rare glimpse into their intertwined history and future.

—JAISAL NOOR



PHOTO COURTESY: EMILY JACIR



PHOTO COURTESY: NEW MUSEUM

Living Is the Best Revenge

Four Seasons Lodge
DIRECTED BY ANDREW JACOBS
RAINLAKE PRODUCTIONS, 2008

If living well is the best revenge, the residents of the Four Seasons Lodge, a bungalow colony in New York's Catskill Mountains, have exacted a hefty vengeance. Created by Jewish Holocaust survivors, the summer resort allows those bonded by trauma to commiserate and schmooze despite what happened to them and their families.

Their struggles and triumphs are the subject of *Four Seasons Lodge*, an intensely moving, life-affirming documentary that is presently being shown at film festivals across the United States and Canada. The film opens with unidentified residents telling viewers about their early years in Europe.

"I was 10 years old when the Nazis came into my town. They killed three people and strung them up. They hung like this for six weeks. That was the beginning," one man offers.

A woman relates that after her concentration camp was liberated, she learned that every member of her family had been killed from parents to siblings to cousins. "I had nobody left. Nobody," she says, her voice cracking, her smile fading. "I was 16 years old."

"We stick to each other," adds

a spry 70-something female about the survivor community. "Right away we find each other. We want to be together. We need that." Some of the women, like widows Olga and Genia, are particularly close. Reflecting on their marriages to men who were first cousins, they admit that "Hitler was the matchmaker. You married who was there, not for love."

Heads nod in agreement, as if this is also their story. Implicit, never articulated, is the conviction that those who did not experience the Holocaust, including children and grandchildren, cannot possibly understand the hatred they've encountered, the brutality they've seen, and the losses they've suffered.

And perhaps they're right. Can anyone but a survivor understand

the emotional toll of remaining alive when so many perished?

The lodge president sums up what is clearly an overriding sentiment: "I would never have thought that after the Second World War we'd have another life, a good life, here."

Agreement is again signaled: Lodge life has been wonderful. Since its purchase in 1982, more than 100 people have spent their summers in 52 bungalows on 46 acres, complete with a swimming pool, card room, synagogue and meeting hall. Live entertainment each Saturday night — Borscht Belt comedians and singers — get residents laughing, flirting and dancing, exhibiting a joie de vivre that is, simply put, amazing.

Residents fight, of course, about

God, politics and what to eat for supper, but they also find solace, knowing that everyone there shares something that defies logic. "No psychiatrist in the world can heal you of this," one man states. "You live with it."

Most interviewees speak directly to the cameras, seemingly eager to condemn Nazi rule. Others refuse, choosing instead to focus on pressing contemporary matters: Illness, aging and whether or not the community should be sold.

Indeed, several years ago the elderly residents voted to put the lodge on the market, then changed their minds. At this point no one knows how much longer they'll be able to maintain the individual bungalows and keep common spaces in adequate repair.

This poignant reality is underscored by a memorial tribute, in the final credits, to three of the film's most memorable characters. It also highlights the value of the Four Seasons Lodge. By capturing the indomitable spirit of a rapidly diminishing population, it speaks to the power of community and friendship.

As the Lodgers would say: L'chaim!

—ELEANOR BADER

For more information call 646-342-4457 or 212-343-1011, or email matt@fourseasonsmovie.org.



The One That Got Away

Frozen River
DIRECTED BY COURTNEY HUNT
HARWOOD HUNT PRODUCTIONS, 2008

At the very northern tip of New York State, far beyond the wealthy counties that surround the Big Apple, winters are bitter cold and the farm economy is long gone, replaced by discount stores and cut-rate malls. It's poor country, and nowhere is poorer than the area along the wide St. Lawrence River.

The river is the boundary between the United States and Canada — except for one small stretch, near the town of Massena, where the St. Regis Mohawk Reservation straddles the river and international relations are superseded by tribal law. Here, for five dollars, local whites and Indians alike play bingo in the hope of a payoff that will stave off the bill collectors for a little while or even finance a new, double-wide trailer. Here, too, are opportunities for even bigger payoffs from cross-border smuggling enterprises — if the smugglers can evade law enforcement officials who lie in wait just outside the reservation.

And here, in *Frozen River*, the wrenching — and rivetingly suspenseful — first film by writer-director Courtney Hunt, Ray Eddy (Melissa Leo), one of Upstate's hard-scrabble whites, wakes up one morning a few days before Christmas to find that her recovering gambler husband Troy has slipped — big-time.

Troy has run off, leaving her with their two sons and taking one car and Ray's savings for the new double-wide that was due to be delivered Christmas Eve. She goes to the reservation to look for him at the bingo parlor, but finds only the abandoned car, just in time to see a stranger drive it away.

Furious, Ray chases the car down, which is how she meets Lila (Misty Upham), a Mohawk woman in many ways her counterpart. Lila is a widowed mother desperate for money to get back her child, who's been taken from her by her wealthier Mohawk in-laws. Ray is desperate for four thousand dollars to pay for the new trailer. Lila knows of a smuggling ring that sneaks undocumented immigrants into the Canadian side of the reservation and then offers good money for someone to drive them across the ice of the frozen St. Lawrence and into the United States. Little as Lila trusts white people, she needs someone white to drive the car, so the New York State troopers won't stop it when it leaves the reservation.

So, very reluctantly, Ray and Lila agree to work together, in the face of formidable odds that include the unreliable and potentially deadly ice they must cross, the troopers waiting if they survive the crossing, and the high likelihood that their employers will pay less than the promised fee



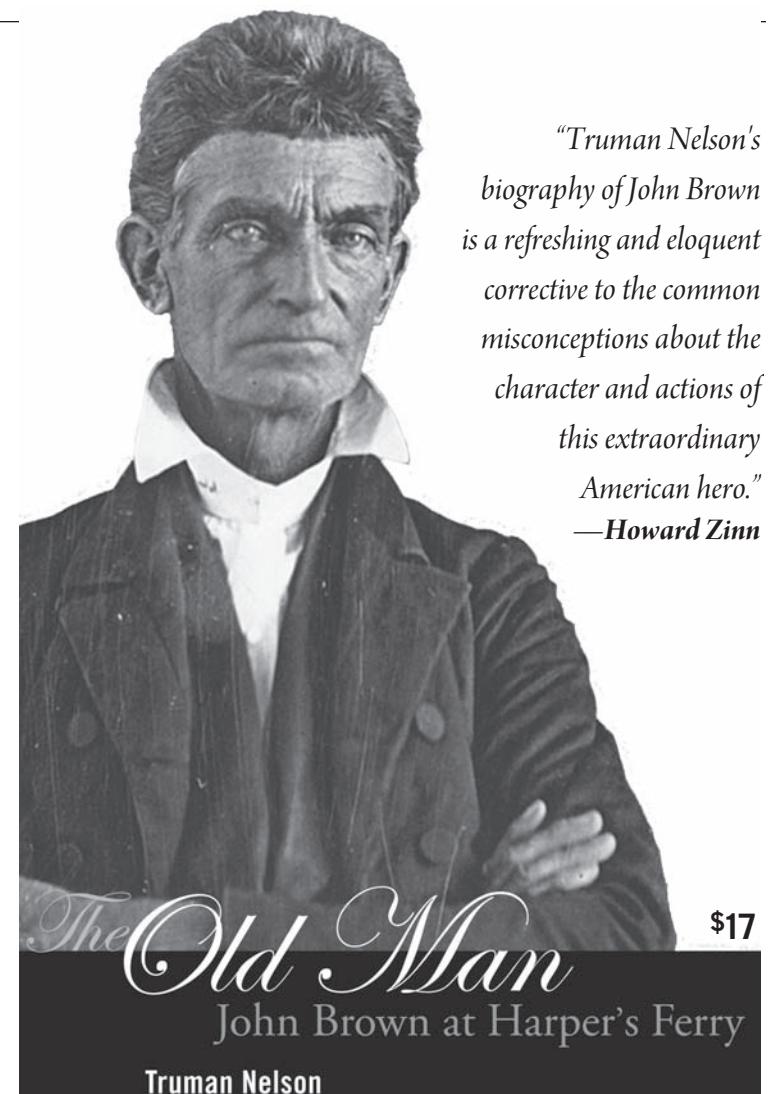
if they do arrive with their human cargo. *Frozen River* is the account of their brief but life-changing partnership.

Movies about women get far fewer Oscar nominations than movies about men, and movies about working-class people get fewer still. True to Academy Award form, *Frozen River* got little notice from the Oscar nominators, except for Melissa Leo's performance and Hunt's screenplay.

I would have given *Frozen River* both awards, for best actress in a leading role and best screenplay. I would have chosen director of photography Reed Morano's capture of the bleak junkyard-cluttered winter landscape for the cinematography award.

And finally, instead of *Slumdog Millionaire* — which took the top award — I would have named *Frozen River* picture of 2008.

—JUDITH MAHONEY
PASTERNAK



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FRI MAR 6, 7PM • FREE
READING: JAN GUENTER BRAUN "SOMEWHERE ELSE." Jess Klassen is the 16-year-old queer child of the president of the Mennonite college. She runs away to find herself and meets Shea, and she becomes afraid of possibility, and her own past.

SAT MAR 7, 7PM • FREE
READING: REBECCA HILL "MEN, MOBS AND LAW." A history of the American left, Rebecca Hill's book "Men, Mobs and Law: Anti-Lynching and Labor Defense in U.S. Radical History" reviews major labor and anti-lynching campaigns and examines political prisoner campaigns, from John Brown to George Jackson.

WED MAR 11, 7PM • \$5 SUGG
SCREENING: UNDER THE SHIRT. Join Carol Ciancutti-Levy for a screening of her 2007 movie, *Absolutely Safe*, which explores the breast implant industry.

FRI MAR 13, 7PM • \$5 SUGG
PRESENTATION: "NEW YORK AND FISCAL CRISIS." Eric Lichten explores class struggles and the development of New York City's 1970s fiscal crises and offers lessons for today.

SAT MAR 14, 7PM • FREE
READING: SHINE, COCONUT MOON. Join Neesha Meminger in a reading of her book, *Shine, Coconut Moon*, about an Indian American teenage girl trying to bridge her identities and the ugliness of prejudice.

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reader comments

Continued from page 2

BATTLE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Responses to "Jewish Rebels Rally Against Zionism," Feb. 6:

I am tired of criticism of Israeli actions somehow being anti-Semitic. Self defense is one thing, but when Israel launches a campaign in the name of "self-defense" that inflicts a 90-to-1 casualty rate on mostly civilians, how can anyone say that is somehow justified?

—BOB

Whatever else is going on, and regardless of any other issues, why is the United States still sending Israel so much money? The United States has enough economic problems of its own without sending billion dollars of dollars to a foreign (developed!) nation. If the United States feels the need to send billions of dollars to another country, I'm sure we here in Canada would be happy recipients

with far less controversy. After all, Canada is the single largest supplier of oil to the United States, and yet we get far worse treatment than the Saudis even though we send more oil to the United States than the Saudis.

—ADAM

PELVIC POWER

Response to "The Macktivist: At Your Cervix Explores Disturbing History of Pelvic Exams," Feb. 6:

I am grateful to Amy Jo Goddard for bringing attention to these disturbing acts and truly believe this film will have the desired effect on those in a position to do something about it. Of course, with Google at our fingertips, we all can find a way to have our voices heard. We all are in a position to do something about it. In fact, I'm about to volunteer my pink donut to New York City's Gynecological Teaching Associates.

—JULIA

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